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Letter of the Secretary of the Interior,  
communicating, in compliance with a resolution of  
the Senate, information concerning the remnant of  
the tribe of the Seminole Indians in South Florida

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LETTER  
OF  
THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR.  
COMMUNICATING,

*In compliance with a resolution of the Senate, information concerning the remnant of the tribe of the Seminole Indians in South Florida.*

MARCH 3, 1869.—Read, referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
Washington, D. C., March 3, 1869.

SIR: The accompanying papers are transmitted to the Senate in answer to a resolution of that body of the 19th ultimo:

That the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of War, each, are directed to furnish to the Senate what information, if any, each department has concerning the remnant of the tribe of Seminole Indians now living in or near the Everglades in South Florida.

I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

O. H. BROWNING,  
Secretary.

Hon. B. F. WADE,  
President pro tempore of the Senate.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
Washington, D. C., March 2, 1869.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the reference by you to this office of the resolution of the United States Senate of February 19, 1869, directing the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of War to furnish the Senate with what information, if any, their respective departments have, concerning the remnant of the tribe of Seminole Indians now living in or near the Everglades, South Florida.

This office has had no official transactions with the Florida Indians since 1859, at which period the superintendent of Indian affairs for the southern superintendency—who had been, in 1858, instructed to effect the removal of those who remained in Florida to the nation west of the Mississippi—reported that nearly all had been removed, a few only remaining. Subsequent representations, however, from different sources, were made to the department, to the effect that a considerable number of this people yet remained in Florida, variously estimated from 300 to 800. Perhaps the most reliable statement is that made by Hon. William Marvin, provisional governor of that State, communicated in his letter of the 28th October, 1865, which was referred to your department with a report thereon, under date of September 1, 1866. I enclose a copy of that report; a copy of a letter from W. H. Gleason, esq., a citizen of Biscayne bay, Florida, dated July 20, 1867, and a copy of one from E. K. Foster, collector of customs at St. Augustine, 17th December, 1867.

These papers will give what information this office possesses respecting these Indians.

Concurring in the opinion expressed by this office in the report referred to, and made by a predecessor of mine, that the Indians remaining in Florida could be induced to emigrate to the west, I respectfully suggest the propriety of measures being adopted to ascertain their number, condition, and disposition towards removal, and, if their removal be found practicable, the accomplishment of that desirable end at an early period.

The Senate resolution is herewith returned.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

\_\_\_\_\_, *Commissioner.*

Hon. O. H. BROWNING,  
*Secretary of the Interior.*

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, OFFICE OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, D. C., September 1, 1866.*

SIR: The subject of the removal of the remaining Seminoles from Florida has during several months past, at intervals, occupied the attention of this office. Under date of October 28, 1865, Hon. William Marvin, provisional governor of Florida, addressed this office in a letter, herewith transmitted, to which reply was made expressing the opinion that it was deemed scarcely possible that there could be so many of those Indians remaining, but suggesting that, in case of difficulty with them, the military authorities should be called upon.

In May, 1866, a gentleman who was engaged in planting a settlement in the vicinity of Biscayne bay, requested action to prevent apprehended collision with these Indians, representing their number at 500 or 600. Reference was made to the delegates of the western Seminoles, then in this city, and the reply of the agent is also herewith. It will be seen that the delegates estimated the number who refused to emigrate at between 300 and 400, and expressed the opinion that they could now be induced to join their people in the west. At that time it was not practicable to take any action in the matter, as the negotiations with the western Seminoles were not concluded.

I have now to acknowledge the receipt, by reference from your department, of a letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting a copy of certain proceedings of citizens of Dade county, Florida, asking the interposition of government for the removal of Indians referred to. It is the opinion of this office, in view of the fact that the disturbing element of slavery has now been taken away from among the Seminoles in the west, that those who remained behind them in Florida could, by the exercise of good judgment, be induced to emigrate and join their brethren, who would joyfully receive them. It is recommended, therefore, that a special agent of the department be appointed, with instructions to visit the southern part of Florida, confer with the Indians referred to, ascertain their numbers and disposition towards removal, and report fully, so that in case a removal appears practicable, an estimate for the purpose may be submitted to Congress and an appropriation obtained. This course would seem advisable and practicable as a method of preventing apprehended difficulties, which may result in another Florida war and great expense to the government.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

D. N. COOLEY, *Commissioner.*

Hon. O. H. BROWNING,  
*Secretary of the Interior.*

WASHINGTON, D. C., *July 20, 1867.*

DEAR SIR: I would call your attention to the fact that there is at the present time remnants of the different tribes of the Florida Indians still residing in South Florida, upon the border of the Everglades, variously estimated at from 300 to 800. Their presence retards and impedes the settlement of that portion of the State, and a feeling of insecurity prevails among the settlers. It is impossible to keep or raise cattle in the county in which I reside, (Dade,) as the Indians are in the habit of killing sufficient cattle for their own sustenance, which has become quite a tax upon the herdsmen of South Florida; and difficulties of a serious nature are liable to arise out of the present state of affairs at any time. These Indians have no lands in Florida which they can call their own, and feeling that they are liable at any time to be driven away and forced to abandon the little patches which they have under cultivation, have but little inducement for agriculture. They do not acknowledge themselves as being bound by the treaty stipulations made with the Seminoles, and are opposed to being removed west of the Mississippi, but wish to remain in Florida. They are very shy in their intercourse with the whites, and fear that efforts may be made to kidnap them and send them west. I am convinced that any attempt to remove them upon the part of the government would result in an expensive war, which could only end in their extermination. In my opinion, it would be far better for the government, and the Indians themselves, to give to each one a tract of land for a homestead and settle upon them a small annuity, and in case of any depredations being committed by them upon the settlers let the damages be deducted from their annuities. This would protect the settlers in a great measure, and encourage the Indians to habits of industry. By establishing a blacksmith, a school, and a saw-mill among them, they would rapidly become civilized, and instead of being a curse to the community would finally become absorbed among the other races and become valuable members of society.

Respectfully yours,

W. H. GLEASON,  
*Biscayne Bay, Florida.*

Hon. N. G. TAYLOR,  
*Commissioner of Indian Affairs.*

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OFFICE OF COLLECTOR OF CUSTOMS,  
*St. Augustine, Florida, December 17, 1867.*

SIR: It has been my aim, while on my trips down to the coast, to give such information from the inhabitants, in regard to the Indians, as was reliable. Such information I have from time to time given you in private conversation.

In my last trip, about two weeks ago, I had a personal interview with Tiger-tail, one of the Indian chiefs, who was then on a hunting expedition up the Indian river. Deeming it of importance to the entire district under your command, I take the liberty of addressing you officially on the subject, being confident that from your long and noted experience with the Indians, and your personal familiarity with their country, you will exercise the same judgment in regard to them as has thus far enabled you to manage the affairs of your district with honor to yourself and your command. I invited Tiger-tail to come with me to St. Augustine, telling him that you were anxious to confer with him. Upon hearing this, he stated that

he was only a lieutenant among his tribe, and had no right to transact any business in their behalf. That his tribe were very anxious to meet the colonel commanding the district, and to have (as he expressed it) a big talk. That if you, or some one deputed by you, would meet them at Fort Pierce, in a "moon and a half," he would send his son Tiger to Lake Okechobee and the Big Cypress for the principal chiefs, (three in number.) Their anxiety for the "talk," and your often expressed desire to me for the same, led me to authorize him to send and make arrangements for the meeting. I trust that if you are unable to attend yourself, at the appointed time, (which will be about the 1st of January,) that you will send such of your officers as will be able to make a treaty as will be beneficial both to the Indians and to the State.

If it is not out of place, I would like to give you a few of my thoughts in regard to the condition of the Indians. That they are friendly, and desire to remain so, there can be no doubt; but that they will always remain so, if they are permitted to traffic promiscuously with the whites, there is a doubt. While down there I heard of a dispute between some Indians and a white person as to the price of a hog, which created some dissatisfaction among the Indians, but which they allowed to pass. They also had, while I was on the river, a "*big drunk*," during which no little dissatisfaction was created by too great an interest on the part of some of the whites in some of the squaws.

The fact, also, that they were further up Indian river on this expedition than they have been since the last Indian war satisfied me that they should be confined to a certain territory, and be allowed to trade with a responsible Indian agent only.

As to the number of Indians, the account among the whites varies from 100 to 150 able-bodied warriors. Tiger-tail's account, in his own words, was, "Okechobee, few," "Big Cypress, plenty." The number of white families living between Matanzas bar and Jupiter inlet is but 26; scattered over a distance of 200 miles, and from 10 to 25 miles apart, all of whom could be exterminated before intelligence of the fact could prevent it.

No Indian war need ever take place if the whites living near the Indians can be made to respect the rights of the Indians. As, however, one evil-disposed man can bring on a war desolating to the State and costly to the country, it is better that the two races be separated.

The best way of reaching Fort Pierce is by means of a steamboat to Indian river inlet; and I have no doubt that on proper representations the Treasury Department might allow the use of the revenue cutter for you to go down and return in. In the hope that this letter will not be considered as interfering with what is not connected with my branch of the service,

I remain, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

ELEAZER K. FOSTER, *Collector*.

[Forwarded by General Pope, with endorsements of Colonel John T. Sprague, 7th infantry.]